



One Year Later — Lessons Learned From Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

By Dean Baldus, Central Region

It has been a year since the dual disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. What have we learned?

After Katrina devastated New Orleans, MARAD's professionally staffed, highly flexible RRF ships were quickly pushed into service to provide relief to the flooded city. The *Cape Kennedy* was used as a forward command post to direct the recovery of the Port of New Orleans. The opening of the port was critical to the relief and recovery of the city.

Over the next few weeks, through the extraordinary efforts of MARAD employees, a flotilla of 10 MARAD ships provided relief to the people of New Orleans. At the completion of the relief and recovery mission, MARAD ships had served more than 280,000 meals, provided more than 82,000 berths and provided assistance to more than 50 organizations including local police and firefighters, the National Guard and U.S. Army.

The lessons MARAD personnel learned during Hurricane Katrina were utilized less than a month

later when Hurricane Rita slammed into the coastal communities along the Texas/Louisiana border. The improved-upon guidelines allowed

According to Dee Varshney, Central Region Director, "We need to know where our people are and, to make this happen, we established the employee accountability desk and pre-evacuation questionnaires so we know where the staff is going before the storm hits. This is an on-line system that allows easy access to the data by an alternate operations center, if one needs to be established."

Central Region personnel also have developed a plan that by applying technology allows them to run their operations center anywhere they can find an internet connection.

As this great tragedy fades from the nation's memory, it is essential that its memory and the lessons learned not fade from the corporate memory of MARAD. We know there will be other natural disasters. The duty to provide assistance to those in distress is part of our maritime culture and tradition. I am confident that, when called, MARAD will respond.



Emergency response vehicles departing the *Cape Vincent* after Hurricane Rita.

the RRF ships *Cape Victory* and *Cape Vincent*, outported in Beaumont, Texas, to shelter emergency vehicles for the city of Beaumont and surrounding counties, protecting them from the ravages of this Category 5 hurricane.

As a result of lessons learned, Central Region personnel have been outfitted with cell phones, laptop computers and wireless broadband cards. If we can get a cell signal, we can operate.